



Press Release

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Sonoma Board Considers Action to Protect Sonoma Coast – Wave Energy Proposal Assures Local Control

Santa Rosa, CA– The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors will consider taking action to secure and protect local control of offshore wave energy projects at their regular board meeting on Tuesday, November 6, 2007. If approved, the board would direct staff of the Sonoma County Water Agency to file an application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for a preliminary permit to conduct feasibility testing of hydrokinetic energy projects in the Pacific Ocean off of the Sonoma Coast.

“We’ll be taking a hard look at this proposal on Tuesday,” said Mike Reilly, Sonoma County Supervisor and former chair of the Coastal Commission. “I will be looking for assurance that our actions work toward protection of our marine resources and that we don’t cede local control of our coastline to business interests or federal regulators in far-away places.” Reilly added.

The proposed board action would direct Agency staff to file an application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for a preliminary permit to conduct feasibility studies and testing of technologies to develop wave energy resources, also known as hydrokinetic energy. The preliminary permit area encompasses the entire Sonoma Coast out to 12 miles offshore. The application contemplates development of hydrokinetic energy technologies demonstration projects capable of generating from 2 to 5 megawatts of power.

“We don’t know at this time if the project will prove to be feasible but we do know that if we don’t pursue this, someone else will. We have to take a serious look at this proposal. I believe it would be better for the Agency to secure this permit and develop the resource because it gives us local control over the future of our coastline.” said Sonoma County Supervisor, Tim Smith.

The Sonoma County Water Agency, the largest electric power user in the North Bay region, has been aggressively developing and acquiring renewable energy sources to serve its needs. Currently the Agency holds 2 megawatts of solar photovoltaic power supply and has access to 6 megawatts of landfill biogas power. The Agency's peak power demand is about 12 megawatts. The Agency is the primary water supplier for 600,000 people in Sonoma and Marin Counties.

"We are well on the way to becoming the first major water supplier in California to use 100% renewable power. That's our goal and the project we are looking at today could be the one that pushes us over the top," said Smith.

Advocates for marine sanctuaries and for local commercial fishing organizations have been closely following plans to develop wave energy projects in northern California particularly along the Sonoma Coast.

"We're intrigued by wave energy generation as 'green' replacement power to enable removal of antiquated, fish-killing hydro dams," commented Zeke Grader, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations. "But these offshore facilities must be carefully placed so as not to obstruct fishing, shipping and recreation. That's why it's so important local government take the lead and not leave wave energy development to the whims of power companies."

"Large industrial wave arrays may or may not represent significant energy potential, but the resulting displacement of our valuable fishing grounds and adverse impacts on sensitive marine ecosystems could irreparably damage our coastal-dependent economy unless such projects are done with extreme care," said Richard Charter with Defenders of Wildlife, "We are unfortunately faced with a lawless land rush situation in our offshore waters right now, and either we wait for Chevron or a utility giant to take control of the Sonoma Coast, as has recently been happening in Mendocino and Humboldt Counties, or our own Board of Supervisors acts proactively to assert local control."

If approved by the Board, Agency staff would submit an application to FERC for a preliminary permit that would allow the Agency to begin feasibility studies of wave energy projects for the Sonoma Coast. Staff estimate that about \$1.75 million in grant funding and Agency funds will be required to fund these studies and would return to the Board at a future date for approval of a financial plan.

Hydrokinetic energy permit applications have already been filed with FERC for ocean tracts in Mendocino and Humboldt counties. Mendocino County reportedly filed a motion to intervene in a FERC permit application submitted by Pacific Gas & Electric Corporation to develop wave energy resources offshore from the City of Fort Bragg. Two other wave energy applications are under consideration offshore from Humboldt County.

Following the Board Action on Tuesday, County and Agency officials will be available to answer questions from the media. To confirm participation in the media availability and obtain information packets please contact Tim Anderson, Sonoma County Water Agency, at 707-521-6208, tima@scwa.ca.gov.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.